

Message Text

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SUBJ: PRIESTS' LETTER ON PANAMA CANAL

SUMMARY: TWENTY-SIX U.S.-CITIZEN CATHOLIC CLERGY WORKING IN PANAMA HAVE ADDRESSED OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT FORD CALLING FOR U.S. TO RECOGNIZE AND REMEDY OLD INJUSTICE THROUGH CONCLUSION OF NEW TREATY WITH PANAMA. TEXT OF LETTER PUBLISHED BY ALL MAJOR DAILIES IN PANAMA; EDITORIAL REACTION WELCOMES THEIR ACTION AS EVIDENCE OF DUTY OF CHURCH TO SPEAK OUT ON MORAL ISSUE INVOLVED. END SUMMARY.

1. ALL MAJOR PANAMA DAILIES ON SATURDAY, AUGUST 9, PUBLISHED FULL TEXT OF A LETTER ADDRESSED TO PRESIDENT FORD BY GROUP OF 26 CATHOLIC CLERGY (19 PRIESTS AND 7 NUNS). LETTER IDENTIFIES SIGNERS AS AMERICAN CITIZENS INVOLVED IN RELIGIOUS MINISTRY IN PANAMA, AND AS PANAMANIAN BY ADOPTION. (FULL TEXT FOLLOWS BELOW.) HEADLINES AND BRIEF SUMMARY STORIES ACCOMPANYING TEXT IN ALL PAPERS FEATURED CONCLUSION OF LETTER THAT U.S. SHOULD RECOGNIZE AND CORRECT OLD INJUSTICE, THE ABUSE OF SOVEREIGNTY OF A SMALL BUT PROUD NATION, AS FITTING MANNER OF CELEBRATING 200TH ANNIVERSARY OF U.S. INDEPENDENCE.

2. LENGTHY EDITORIAL IN SUNDAY EDITION OF PRO-GOVERNMENT
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"EL PANAMA AMERICA" (HEADED "A VOICE WHICH CANNOT BE ACCUSED

OF EXTREMISM") SPEAKS OF DUTY OF CATHOLIC CHURCH, AS HEIR OF CHRIST, TO STRUGGLE AGAINST SOCIAL OR HUMAN STRUCTURES IMPEDING HUMAN DIGNITY, CITING COLONIALISM AS ONE SUCH INJUSTICE AND CASE OF PANAMA AS PARTICULAR EXAMPLE.

3. THIS IS SECOND OPEN LETTER ORIGINATED BY GROUP FROM CATHOLIC CLERGY ON THIS SUBJECT WITHIN TWO MONTHS; PREVIOUS LETTER ALONG ROUGHLY SIMILAR LINES WAS ORIGINATED BY GROUP OF 16 VINCENTIAN PRIESTS ON OR ABOUT MAY 14. FORMER LETTER DID NOT IDENTIFY SIGNERS AS U.S. CITIZENS, BUT 11 OF THOSE WHO SIGNED FORMER LETTER ARE ALSO AMONG SIGNERS OF MOST RECENT ONE.

4. COMMENT: PROMINENCE GIVEN TO LETTER, AND UNCHARACTERISTICALLY WARM EDITORIAL ENDORSEMENT OF A CHURCH ACTION, ARE CONSISTENT WITH RECENT PUBLICITY GIVEN TO ACTIVITIES AFFECTING PUBLIC OPINION WITHIN U.S. RELATIVE TO PROSPECTS FOR NEW TREATY. END COMMENT.

5. BEGIN TEXT: QUOTE DEAR MR. PRESIDENT:
QUOTE WE THE UNDERSIGNED ARE CATHOLIC MEN AND WOMEN, MISSIONERS, CITIZENS OF THE UNITED STATES, WORKING IN PANAMA FOR THE SPIRITUAL AND SOCIAL WELFARE OF THE PANAMANIAN PEOPLE.

QUOTE WHILE NEGOTIATIONS FOR A NEW TREATY ARE IN PROGRESS, WE ARE DISTURBED BY WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN CONGRESS--THE SENATORS WHO HAVE OPENLY ANNOUNCED THEIR OPPOSITION TO A NEW TREATY, THE MOVE IN THE HOUSE TO CUT FUNDS FOR NEGOTIATING TEAM. THESE ACTIONS ARE VERY DISTURBING TO THE PANAMANIAN PEOPLE WHO, FOR A LONG TIME, HAVE CONSIDERED THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES AS FRIENDS.
QUOTE WE FEEL IT OUR DUTY AS CITIZENS OF THE UNITED STATES, AS PANAMANIAN BY ADOPTION AND AS COMMITTED CHRISTIANS TO WRITE YOU AND ASK YOUR HELP IN BRINGING TO A SUCCESSFUL AND JUST CONCLUSION, THE TREATY NEGOTIATIONS STILL UNDERWAY BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENTS OF PANAMA AND THE UNITED STATES.

QUOTE IN THE MINDS OF KNOWLEDGEABLE AND FAIR PEOPLE EVERYWHERE, THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT BUT THAT THE HAY/BUNAU-VARILLA TREATY OF 1903, GIVING THE UNITED STATES PERPETUAL CONTROL OVER THE CANAL ZONE WAS AN UNJUST TREATY. VARIOUS REVISIONS OR ADAPTIONS IN THE INTERVENING YEARS HAVE NOT CHANGED THAT BASIC INJUSTICE.
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QUOTE WE ARE HAPPY THAT YOU HAVE APPOINTED COMPETENT MEN SUCH AS MR. ELLSWORTH BUNKER AND MR. HENRY KISSINGER TO NEGOTIATE A NEW TREATY. WE ASK YOU TO LEND THE ENORMOUS WEIGHT OF YOUR OFFICE TO INSIST THAT A NEW AND JUST TREATY IS MADE AND RATIFIED IN SHORT ORDER, RECOGNIZING THE TOTAL SOVEREIGNTY OF PANAMA OVER WHAT IS NOW CALLED THE CANAL ZONE.

QUOTE WE WONDER HOW PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES WOULD FEEL IF A

FOREIGN POWER WERE TO CONTROL THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER AND FIVE MILES OF TERRITORY ON BOTH SIDES OF SAME, FLYING ITS OWN FLAG THERE, HAVING ITS OWN SCHOOLS, COURTS, POLICE, POSTAL SERVICE, CUSTOMS, ETC. NO MATTER WHAT TREATY MIGHT HAVE BEEN SIGNED BEFOREHAND BY A FOREIGNER IN THEIR NAME, WE ARE CERTAIN THAT THE AMERICAN PEOPLE WOULD NEVER HAVE TOLERATED SUCH AN AFFRONT TO ITS NATIONAL DIGNITY.

QUOTE SUCH HAS BEEN THE CASE WITH PANAMA FOR 72 YEARS. THE COUNTRY IS DIVIDED BY A WATERWAY AND A TEN-MILE STRIP OF TERRITORY CONTROLLED AND RULED BY A FOREIGN POWER, ALBEIT A SUPPOSED FRIENDLY POWER. SURELY THE AMERICAN PEOPLE AND THEIR DULY ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES WILL SEE SUCH AN ARRANGEMENT AS UNFAIR AND HUMILIATING.

QUOTE WE MARVEL AT THE PATIENCE AND LONG SUFFERING OF THE PANAMANIAN PEOPLE IN THIS MATTER. NOW WE ARE WORRIED. AS TIME DRAGS ON, WE FEAR THAT THE BITTERNESS AND FRUSTRATION OF 72 YEARS OF INJUSTICE IS BEGINNING TO CHANGE THE ATTITUDES OF THE PANAMANIAN PEOPLE. WE ARE ALARMED AT WHAT COULD RESULT.
QUOTE WE FEEL THAT THE BASIC DEMANDS OF THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT DO REPRESENT THE LEGITIMATE DEMANDS OF ALL PANAMANIAN, AND INDEED OF ALL FAIR MINDED PEOPLE.

QUOTE DESPITE RECENT PROBLEMS, THE UNITED STATES IS STILL A STRONG COUNTRY. LET IT NOW PROVE THAT IT IS MORALLY STRONG ALSO, BY RECOGNIZING AND REDRESSING AN OLD INJUSTICE AND ABUSE OF THE SOVEREIGNTY OF A SMALL BUT PROUD NATION, A FITTING WAY TO CELEBRATE OUR OWN 200TH ANNIVERSARY OF INDEPENDENCE. UNQUOTE
END TEXT. SIGNERS WERE: THE REVS. FREDERICK J. MCETERMAN, TOMAS A. SENDLEIN, C.M.; ALLAN J. MCLELLAN, C.M.; CHARLES SCHUSTER, C.M.; MICHAEL JOHNAKIN, C.M.; JOSEPH A. SANNINO, C.M.; JOHN P. ENRIGHT, JOSEPH V. CUMMINS, C.M.; DONALD J. HEADLEY,
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JOHN A. DONAHUE, MAURICE ROCHE, C.M.; PAUL R. BUETER, JOSEPH A. ELZI, C.M.; DAVID LIEBNER, C.M.; JOHN E. KANE, C.M.; THOMAS J. HYNES, C.M.; ARTHUR KOLINSKI, D.M.; PAUL G. MANDERFIELD, AND KEVIN P. LAWLER, C.M.; AND SISTERS JENNIFER MCDONALD, BARBARA OZELSKI, TERESA ALEXANDER, LORETTA KRUEGLER, M. JOANNE DEEGAN, DANJELA LUSK AND M. BONAVENTURA MACKEY.

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